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THE  
AGRARIAN INDIAN COMMUNITIES  
OF HIGHLAND BOLIVIA

BY

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FIG. 1—An agrarian Indian community on the shores of Lake Titicaca. The small individual plots are separated by stone walls. This is a typical situation for a clan, with hills rising on three sides of their little valley and the lake in front, isolating them from the rest of the world.



THE AGRARIAN INDIAN COMMUNITIES OF  
HIGHLAND BOLIVIA

The republic of Bolivia consists of three great natural divisions: the eastern lowland; the long valleys reaching westward into, and, in some cases, beyond the eastern range of the Andes; and the highland plateau, or *altiplano*, and its bordering ranges. Each of these regions is characterized by distinctive soils, climate, vegetation, products, and human distributions. A varying relation to the soil from region to region is manifested in a corresponding diversity in systems of agriculture and land tenure.

## BOLIVIA AN AGRICULTURAL COUNTRY

Highland Bolivia, consisting of the plateau and of the valleys lying above some 6,000 feet, is distinctly an agricultural country. Though Bolivia is renowned principally for its mineral products—gold, silver, copper, and tin—most of the people are occupied in tilling the soil. According to the last census (1900) 564,009, or 32 per cent, of the inhabitants were engaged in agriculture, while only 399,037 were occupied in "general industries," and but 12,625 in mining.<sup>1</sup>

Since the earliest times the people of this region have been farmers. Mining, stock raising, commerce, fishing have been merely incidental. Tilling the ground, irrigating the fields, planting and harvesting their crops have been the occupations about which grew up laws, government, social customs, and religion. The Inca, some centuries before Columbus, found about Lake Titicaca sedentary tribes of Indians, who already for ages had practiced agriculture. He extended over them his rule, making them a part of his empire, Tahuantinsuyo, itself a politico-agrarian institution. When the Spaniards entered this

<sup>1</sup> Geografía de la República de Bolivia, official edit., Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica, La Paz, 1905.

Censo general de la población de la República de Bolivia, Septiembre 1° de 1900, Vol. 1: Resultados Generales, *ibid.*, La Paz, 1902.

region, though they came in search of gold, many of them soon abandoned the quest for such treasure and settled down, appropriating land and people alike to form their great rural estates.

### DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION

Though constituting only about one-third of the territory of Bolivia, the plateau area contains some three-fourths of the population. In the five upland departments, La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Cochabamba, and Chuquisaca, are located all of the large cities and most of the towns of the republic. Here, too, are found nearly all of the white and mixed races and all of the civilized Indians, the Quechuas and the Aymaras, who are the agriculturalists of the country.

Yet large tracts of the highlands are utterly unfit for cultivation or for human habitation. The lofty mountain regions (above 14,000 feet) are thinly peopled, as are also great expanses on the *altiplano* where deposits of salt, borax, and other mineral substances are located in an almost absolute desert. This has crowded the inhabitants into certain closely restricted areas, in which sufficient soil exists to render agriculture possible. Some of the high valleys from 8,000 to 12,000 feet above sea level and selected spots about Lake Titicaca show from 40 to 100 persons per square mile, being in many cases made up almost entirely of rural inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> These thickly settled centers of population are usually far separated from each other. They are divided one from the other by high ridges, insurmountable ranges, almost impassable torrents, or on the *altiplano* by extensive semi-desert wastes. About the shores of Lake Titicaca great irregularity of the coast line has contributed to the isolation of the individual settlements located there.

### ATTACHMENT TO THE SOIL

With compactly settled districts such as these, dependent from the very earliest times upon agriculture, there could but result a

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Bowman: The Distribution of Population in Bolivia, *Bull. Geogr. Soc. of Philadelphia*, Vol. 7, 1909, pp. 74-93.

strong attachment to the soil and well-established forms of land tenure. It is no surprise to find that to the Bolivian aborigine "land is the very breath of life." If he holds it as free property it is his "pearl of greatest price." So dear is it to him that, in time of famine, he will sell his child rather than part with his diminutive parcel of ground. He fences it with a wall of stones or mud. He carefully guards the boulders that mark its bounds. He looks upon every traveler with a suspicious eye for fear the stranger may covet his tiny holdings. If, as is usually the case, the land belongs not to an individual, but to a group of persons who hold it collectively, it is no less dear. Every member of the body is *per se* a defender of its holdings. No greater perfidy can be committed than to violate or fail to support the ancient custom of guarding the common holdings.

The Indians not only love their land; they cling to it generation after generation. Most of the families have lived on their present holdings from time immemorial. Nothing will induce them to move. There is far more fertile soil in the valleys east of the Cordillera. A milder climate may be found in the valleys which the Indian traders visit from time to time. But these facts do not entice them to abandon the lands upon which their fathers lived. Even the inducement of good wages in the cities, at mines, or upon the railroads can seldom uproot these devoted farmers from their little plots of ground. Even if, as often happens, the land be absorbed by an adjoining *hacienda* and passed repeatedly from one owner to another, the Indian remains on it, being transferred with the soil. Only by the use of violence and by the demolition of his humble cottage, the destruction of his sheep corral, and the appropriation of his fields can he be driven from the place. Centuries of occupation have fixed him fast to the soil.

It is easily seen that only the most meager subsistence can be secured from such diminutive plots of land as those held by the community Indians. To supplement the scanty living obtained from the soil they must engage in various other pursuits. Those who live on Lake Titicaca or the Desaguadero River build boats

of the *totora*, a kind of bulrush that grows in the shallow margins of the water, and, with nets of their own making, catch fish which they sell fresh in the markets near by and dried in those more distant. Others carry on a number of home industries: weaving blankets from the wool of sheep, llamas, alpacas, and vicuñas; making crude pottery, plaiting grass mats and baskets, or manufacturing hats, sandals, bags, and other such things that their neighbors need. Still others, with their droves of llamas, gather llama dung (the principal fuel used on the plateau) or act as carriers between regions not yet reached by the railroads. Even so, most of the Indians, though with few wants and well schooled in thrift by hard necessity, are constantly on the verge of starvation, and the failure of a single year's crops brings them face to face with actual famine.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITIES

Under the geographical conditions already mentioned it was but natural that there should grow up a system of communities, where each separate valley or secluded corner of the plateau developed its individual life, centered about the cluster of thatched dwellings where lived the closely related members of a clan. Such a social organization, with its inevitable agrarian character, seems to have existed on the highlands of Peru and Bolivia from the very earliest times. The old Spanish historians describe this communal system and the collective ownership of land that prevailed throughout the Inca Empire. Early Indian tradition records the belief that their first rulers established this common possession of the soil. That it was in no sense an innovation of the Incas is maintained by those who have studied the Aymara civilization which preceded the Quechua dynasty.<sup>3</sup> It seems rather to have dated from the very beginnings of Aymara culture and to have been the foundation upon which the social

<sup>3</sup> Bautista Saavedra: *El Ayllu*, Paris, 1913.

C. R. Markham: *The Incas of Peru*, New York, 1910, pp. 159-172.

Heinrich Cunow: *Die soziale Verfassung des Inkareichs*, Stuttgart, 1896.

T. A. Joyce: *South American Archaeology*, London, 1912, pp. 99-143.

A. F. Bandelier: *The Islands of Titicaca and Koati*, New York, 1910.

and political, as well as the agricultural, organization was built, both among the Quechuas and the Aymaras.

This communal system had as its base the *ayllu*, or clan, of the Aymara and Quechua tribes. Originating probably as a purely social organization the *ayllu* took on an agrarian character as the people became more sedentary in their life, the land replacing the family as the bond of union. As a result the communities usually contained several *ayllus* banded together by the common possession of the land. The village or vicinity occupied by this group of closely related families was known as a *marca*, a term said to be of purely Aymara origin and preserved in many of the place names of the Andes, but curiously enough almost the identical word used among the ancient Teutons (with a different original significance) to designate their community, the mark.

A peculiar feature of the ancient community organization, surviving in many places today, was the division of each clan into two groups, the *aransaya* and the *urinsaya*. This division of the people is said to have originated at the time of the founding of Cuzco as the capital of the nascent Inca Empire. In that city the inhabitants were separated into these two groups, the terms meaning upper and lower divisions. Just what significance this distinction carried with it is uncertain, but the *aransaya* people were in some way considered superior. Whatever the significance, this division was preserved throughout the history of the Inca dynasty, survived the reconstruction attendant upon the Spanish conquest, and marks many of the communities in Bolivia and Peru even yet, with but slightly modified name.

#### COMMON LANDS

The lands held by the *ayllus* were of at least two, probably three, kinds. There was the grazing land which was free to all members of the clan, and upon which the *guacchallama*, or common flocks of llamas and alpacas, were herded by a designated representative of the community. There was also the agricultural land, which was distributed annually among the heads of particular families. In addition to these two kinds of common

holdings, the plot of ground upon which each house was built seems to have been held almost as private property that descended from generation to generation as a possession of the family. This, however, could probably not be alienated, at least to persons outside of the *ayllu*.

In the yearly allotment of tillable land each head of a family received what was known as a *sayaña*. This consisted of one *tupu*, or "measure," of ground, equivalent approximately to a Spanish *fanega* and a half, or to about 2.4 acres.<sup>4</sup> The individual allotment, the *sayaña*, did not always consist of a single parcel but was made up sometimes of several widely separated plots in order that the choice lands might suffice to go around in the distribution and in order that each might have a piece of the various kinds of ground. On Lake Titicaca, for example, an Indian might receive a small plot in the rich alluvial soil at the border of the lake, another back upon the piedmont slope, and another upon the cold summits of the near-by ridges. Each of these parcels would be planted in a different kind of crop. The one near the lake would yield corn, those farther back quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*), while the rich but cold soil on the hilltops would serve only for potatoes, ocas (*Oxalis tuberosa*), or other equally hardy crops. Besides the one "measure" that each paterfamilias received, an additional *tupu* was assigned him for each son, and half a *tupu* for each daughter. The son if marrying within the clan would retain his *tupu*, or rather his right to a *tupu* in the annual allotment. The daughter did not have this privilege, her measure reverting to the father or the *ayllu*. Inheritance in ancient times was probably by the female line, but in post-Conquest days it was through the son.<sup>5</sup> Childless couples sometimes adopted a child, called *uta-guagua*, who might perpetuate their rights in the *ayllu*, for, like the Hebrews, they were very solicitous that their heritage should not lapse.

In the cultivation of the land, that dedicated to religious uses was given precedence. All joined in preparing this, planting it,

<sup>4</sup> Garcilasso de la Vega: First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas, Vol. 2, pp. 9-11, *Hakluyt Soc. Publs.*, 1st Series, Vol. 45, London, 1871.

<sup>5</sup> Bandelier, *The Islands of Titicaca and Koati*, pp. 84 and 146.



and reaping the crops. This, and the similar service rendered on the imperial lands, seems to have constituted the principal taxation imposed by the Inca upon his people. After the preparation of the land set aside for the Sun, that of widows, orphans, the infirm, and the wives of soldiers on duty was next cultivated in the same manner. The individuals' *sayañas* were next planted. Even here the spirit of co-operation prevailed, for many worked together voluntarily, helping each other on their respective parcels. Finally the land of the nobles and that of the emperor were cultivated, all joining in the task.

In spite of the demands of a population so great that they could barely subsist upon the products of their lands, the Indians scrupulously allowed certain parts of the ground to lie fallow during much of the time. Opinions differ as to how often they cultivated the individual fields. At the present time Bolivian farmers say about one-eighth of the poorer land is cultivated each year. The better lands may be planted yearly. Señor Alfredo Sanjinés, in a report<sup>6</sup> on agricultural conditions in the Department of Oruro, calculates that in the Province of Carangas each field is tilled only once in twenty or thirty years. Dr. David Forbes, in his excellent study of the Aymara Indians,<sup>7</sup> states that land is cultivated every five years, being allowed to rest the other four. This probably represents a fair average for present as well as ancient times, since much of the land on the mountains and on the *altiplano* is extremely poor in quality and, being plowed to the depth of only a few inches, would yield little if planted more frequently.

#### MODIFICATIONS INTRODUCED BY THE SPANIARDS

Though during the growth of the Inca Empire some modifications were introduced, it would appear that the basis of the land system remained almost unaltered until the advent of the Europeans. The land hunger of the Spanish conquerors caused

<sup>6</sup> Alfredo Sanjinés G.: Sección de Agricultura: Informes varios, *Rev. del Minist. de Colon. y Agric.*, Vol. 3, 1907, pp. 358-364; reference on p. 363.

<sup>7</sup> David Forbes: On the Aymara Indians of Bolivia and Peru [communicated, June 21, 1870, to the Ethnological Society of London], London, 1870.

many of the communities to disappear and brought about certain changes in those that remained, though the Crown decreed numerous measures for the protection of the Indians and their lands.<sup>8</sup> During the colonial times the *ayllu* was supplanted in some respects by a secondary unit which reveals its origin in its Spanish name. This is the *estancia*, introduced as a subdivision of the *ayllu*. Originally signifying merely the common pasture allotted to the flocks of a small group of families, the term came to be applied to this smaller group itself and to the parcels of agricultural land held by the families composing it. With the loss of the political significance of the *ayllu* and the partial replacing of the community head by representatives of the colonial government, this smaller unit assumed some of the attributes of the *ayllu*, such as the obligation of keeping up irrigation ditches, preserving and defending the ancient landmarks, as well as the oversight of the common pasture.

#### MODIFICATIONS INTRODUCED BY THE BOLIVIAN REPUBLIC

Since colonial days far-reaching changes have been decreed at various times but without greatly affecting the agrarian features of the communities, though their political character has been modified. The office of *cacique*, or chief of the Indian communities, was entirely abolished in 1825 by decree of Simón Bolívar, the "Libertador" of Bolivia. The *alcalde*, who took his place as the head of each communal unit, receives his appointment from the *corregidor* (local representative of the Bolivian Government), but probably often in accordance with suggestions of the Indians themselves. His duties are the maintenance of order; he is virtually the sheriff of the community. Under him, but in a different capacity, is the *ilacata*, appointed in the same way, upon whom rests the responsibility of collecting the tax paid by the community Indians to the Bolivian authorities (Fig. 2). For either of these positions the *corregidor* would scarcely select a person whom he did not feel sure to be persona grata with the

<sup>8</sup> Recopilación de leyes de los Reinos de las Indias, 5th edit., 4 vols., Madrid, 1841; reference in Vol. 2, pp. 217-309.





FIG. 2—An *ilacata*, with his staff of office. The *ilacata* is an Indian functionary upon whom rests the responsibility of collecting the taxes paid by the community Indians to the Bolivian authorities.

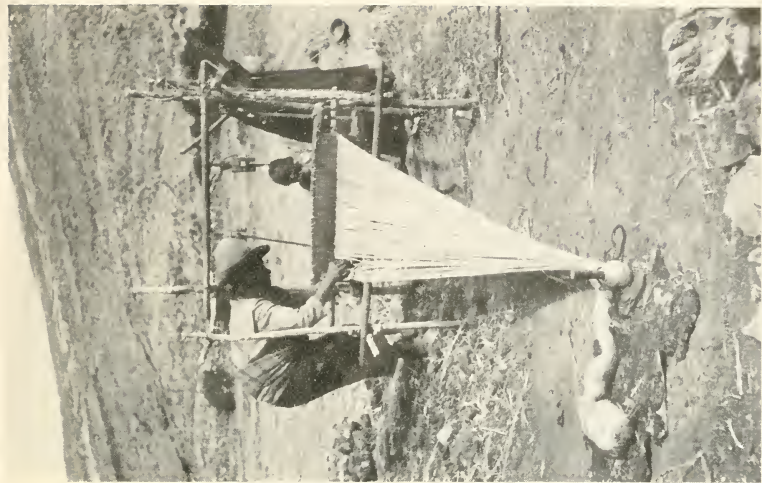


FIG. 3—A community Indian weaving. Weaving is one of the most important of the home industries of the community Indians. All the clothing worn is home-spun and home-woven, and is made from wool grown on their own llamas or sheep.



Indians themselves. Two *alcaldes de campo* who regulate such matters as the cultivation of fields, the distribution of water for irrigation, the collecting and care of crops, and the rendering of personal service complete the executive and administrative force of the community. The jurisdiction of each of these officers is coterminous with the individual community. Bandelier<sup>9</sup> notes the existence of a council of elders (*principales*), composed of those who have served in the above capacities. He considers that this council is the de facto government of a community, though its operation is so silent and its deliberations so carefully guarded that its existence is seldom even suspected.

The republic, continuing colonial custom, exacts a land tax from each *comunario*. The amount varies according to his holdings, which in turn depend upon his relation to the various classes into which membership in the community is divided. In a community there exist the following classes: *originarios*, *forasteros*, *reservados*, and *próximos*. Sometimes the last three are grouped together under the term *agregados*. Not all communities contain all of these different classes. As the names are all Spanish it is thought that they owe their origin to colonial times, though it is known that some such system existed in the days of the Incas. The Aymaras' use of their own term *yanapaco* to describe one whose relation to the community corresponds to that of the three last classes gives strength to the belief that they may have existed under other names in ancient times. The *originarios* are those who from the remote past have belonged to the community and received their yearly assignment of lands. They generally receive double the amount of land held by the other classes. The *agregados* (including the three classes referred to) are those who in more recent times have become attached to the community, from outside the circle. Being allotted about half the amount of land held by an *originario* they pay about half as much in land tax. While their *contribución territorial* (as the land tax is called) is from Bs. 3.00 to Bs. 5.00, the *originarios*

<sup>9</sup> Mr. A. F. Bandelier had collected materials for a work on the ethnology of the Bolivian Indians. His widow, Mrs. Fanny Bandelier, very kindly placed these notes at the disposal of the writer during the preparation of the present paper.

pay the yearly sum of Bs. 10.00. (The boliviano is equal to about 40 cents American money.) No other land tax is imposed upon the Indians who belong to communities. However, keeping up the customs of the Inca and colonial régimes, the *comunarios* are required to contribute certain personal services to the government or its representatives. These consist chiefly in supplying provisions for any troops that may be in the vicinity, providing messengers when needed by the local authorities, and furnishing mules for travelers when demanded by the *corregidor*. This custom gives rise to great abuses on the part of the local authorities, who often use this obligation as a cloak for securing many personal services.

Aside from this general oversight and the exaction of the land tax the Bolivian government leaves the communities very largely to their own control. Even the police of the republic seldom interfere in the internal affairs of the community except in case of serious disorder.

In 1866 President Melgarejo promulgated a decree by which the communities were abolished and the lands were declared to belong to the Indians in severalty. An immediate result was that many of the Indian holdings passed into the hands of whites or *mestizos*. After the overthrow of Melgarejo's dictatorship these sales were annulled (1871), the bona fide buyers being reimbursed by the government, which still carries a part of the cost of this act of justice as an item in its internal debt. The size of this item (Bs. 338,037.41) shows how rapidly the Indian lands began to pass into other hands during the five years in which the legislation of Melgarejo was in force. Succeeding legislation has aimed to protect the aborigines, while at the same time recognizing the Indians as owners, in severalty, of their portions of communal land.<sup>10</sup> Officially the term employed now is always *excomunidades*. The Indians may dispose of their holdings by appearing before the proper authority (the *notario de hacienda*), establishing their titles, and asserting their willingness to sell.

<sup>10</sup> Manuel Ordóñez López: *Constitución política de la República de Bolivia: Leyes y disposiciones más usuales*, 2 vols., La Paz, 1917; reference in Vol. I, pp. 584-619.

They have no written deeds, of course, but prove their ownership by the testimony of their neighbors, particularly the older members of the vicinity. Much of the community land has thus passed out of the Indians' hands since that date. However, the cohesion is so strong in these time-honored agrarian groups that many of the so-called ex-communities have as completely disregarded the Republic's statutes as they did those of the Spanish colonial authorities and continue to maintain their communal ownership as in times gone by.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF SURVIVING COMMUNITIES

The distribution of these still surviving communities is determined largely by certain geographical factors. Location—chiefly with respect to travel routes—the depth and character of the soil, and climatic conditions are the influences that have been most potent in the preservation or destruction of these “ex-communities.”

Communal ownership is seldom encountered along the main routes of travel, particularly the older routes. Here the land is chiefly in *fincas*, free holdings, survivals in most part of those great estates granted as *encomiendas* or *repartimientos* by the Spanish Crown. Along the principal roads and railroads of today there have grown up also many large farms of recent creation composed of lands once held by community Indians but either bought or “acquired by other means” by men of white or mixed blood. It is in out-of-the-way corners of the country that community lands are still found: among the mountains where whites seldom penetrate, in secluded angles of the piedmont slopes, among the isolated peninsulas that border Lake Titicaca, on high, inaccessible ridges, and out in semi-desert wastes on the open *altiplano*.

As to soil, the Spanish sought that of the valleys, where, either on the flat valley floors or upon the rich and well-watered alluvial fans, most of the Bolivian farms are located. The mountain ridges with their scantier and less fertile soil were left to the Indians, as were also the salt-impregnated lands of poorly

drained areas on the plateau, and the tiny, though fertile pockets at the high valley heads.

Climate was a determining factor, largely because of the penetrating cold at that great altitude. Where a softer, milder temperature was encountered, as in the many valleys that dissect the eastern Andes, the Spaniard not only found that he could better withstand the cold himself but that the European plants and animals which he introduced could more easily become acclimated. So upon the colder heights and the wind-swept *altiplano* the Indians were usually allowed to retain their land. While rainfall appears to have influenced less the distribution of *finca* and community than it has the size of individual holdings in both categories, the supply of water for irrigation has been an important factor in determining whether a community should be permitted to survive. The easily irrigated lands have generally passed into the hands of whites.

#### DEPARTMENT OF LA PAZ

Though Indian communities exist in all the highland departments of the republic (Figs. 4 and 5), La Paz, with its large proportion of Indian population—75 per cent, according to the census of 1900—contains the greatest number. In this department every province, and probably every canton,<sup>11</sup> is represented by aboriginal agrarian groups. Omasuyos has always been known as the center of all that is aboriginal, and in the number of Indians who belong to these communities it is far ahead. Pacajes, Sicasica, and Muñecas follow. These are all distinctly plateau provinces, few of them having any land below 12,500 feet. (The recently created provinces of Camacho and Ingavi from parts respectively of Omasuyos and Pacajes have been ignored as separate units in this study because almost no statistics are available since the date of their establishment, 1908 and 1909.) The valley provinces, Larecaja, Inquisivi, Yungas, and Caupolicán, have far fewer communities. The plateau provinces

<sup>11</sup> The territorial subdivisions of Bolivia are designated, in descending order of rank, as follows: *departamentos*, *provincias*, *cantones*.



combine the geographical factors already referred to, of isolation, poverty or scantiness of soil, and severe climate.

*Provinces of Omasuyos and Muñecas*

Omasuyos and Muñecas lie along the northeastern border of Lake Titicaca. This has been from Inca times the stronghold of the Aymaras, and here their ancient customs are best preserved. In these districts weaving is done on the primitive loom (Fig. 3). Plowing and harvesting follow the time-honored ancestral methods. Quechua and Spanish, the tongues of the conquerors, are rarely known, while, as about the southern end of the lake, the Aymara language is preserved in great purity. Religion is here nearer to paganism than to Christianity. Education is rare. The native blood of Collasuyo, as the Incas termed this Titicaca region, is freer from admixture than elsewhere. Character is cruder, rougher, but more moral, with typical Aymara traits, utterly unlike the mild-natured Quechua of Cuzco or of southern Bolivia. This is distinctly a region of Aymara survivals. Its primitive communal land tenure is in keeping with this heritage from the remote past.<sup>12</sup>

Isolation and an extremely hard environment account for much of the backwardness of this region. Routes of travel, in ancient as in modern times, have left these provinces far to one side. The movement of armies and of trade has followed the southwestern shore or has crossed the lake from northwest to southeast, but seldom has passed along the northeastern side. The southwestern route is more level, the shore line more regular. Along the northeastern side of the lake the land surface is broken by spurs of the Andes and by numerous rapid streams, while a series of peninsulas juts far out into the water, and numerous corresponding bays make both land and water travel along this shore circuitous. Thus these provinces have lain completely out of the current of important events and constitute one of the most secluded sections of the country.

<sup>12</sup> Rigoberto Paredes: *La Altiplanicie: Descripción de la Provincia de Omasuyu*, *Bol. Direcc. Gen. de Estadíst. y Estudios Geogr.*, Vol. 10, 1914, pp. 51-123. La Paz.

On the peninsulas of this northeastern shore are located some of the strongest Indian communities in the country. In this isolated environment they have held their own for centuries against any encroachments. A description of one of these will suffice, as a type of the community in its least modified forms.

On the peninsula of Achacache that reaches far out into the lake to meet the opposing peninsula of Copacabana, thus forming the Strait of Tiquina, there exists the strong independent community of Calaque. Composed of some three hundred families who occupy several small villages of neatly thatched adobe houses, they hold and cultivate this land in common, as in ancient times. An area of some fifty square miles is included in their possessions, and their well-tilled fields are estimated to be worth about 500,000 bolivianos (\$200,000). As chief, or *alcalde*, they have an ex-service man from the Bolivian army, a pure Indian, one of their own number. Under his leadership they have been able to resist all attempts to encroach upon their land. Though legally each member of the community holds his own *sayaña*, so strong has been the cohesion in this group that few have dared to part with their holdings. On one occasion when a member of the community yielded to the inducement of a flattering offer for his *sayaña*, the Indians en masse took up arms and, attacking the adjoining farm whose owner had bought the parcels, they forced the return of the deed of sale, only, however, after a stubborn fight in which a number of the farmer's Indians were killed. On another occasion some "*jaimas*" (tax-free holdings of a former Indian noble) were sold, also with the result of a battle, in which the community regained its land.

### *The Community of Collana*

Another community where political control remains almost entirely in the hands of the Indian *ayllu* is that of Collana, not far from La Paz. Though within some ten miles of the city this little community has seldom been seen by any of the white inhabitants, for it lies high up among the hills that close the southeastern end of the La Paz gorge. Consisting of only a few



square miles, and numbering not more than six hundred souls, this tiny settlement in its isolated site, where difficulty of travel, a rigorous climate (for it is on the cold heights over 13,000 feet above sea level), and scarcity of tillable soil make intrusion of the whites unlikely, has maintained its organization throughout the centuries—this, too, in spite of the fact that almost from their doorways, though their secluded village itself is well-nigh invisible from the neighboring hills, one can look down upon the whole valley and the city of La Paz. From this secluded eerie they have watched four centuries of white generations come and go, with all the vicissitudes of political and economic changes, but have not been affected in the slightest degree. Each year there takes place the re-allotment of the land; each day the cattle go out to pasture upon their common grazing land; each season, as in former times, the planting and the harvesting is carried on in voluntary co-operation. Bound up with their communal land system is a complete social and political organization. They elect annually an *alcalde* from their own number and a *cabildo* (or council) to assist him. To these, their own officers, are referred all questions of public administration. They direct the distribution of the land. They regulate the use of the meager springs that supply the community with water. They even sit in judgment in civil and criminal cases, imposing at times the penalty of death. So jealously do these Indians guard their sacred rights to the land and to their independence that it is said they permit no outsider to remain overnight in their community.<sup>13</sup> The settlement is typical of many others that are hidden away in such inaccessible nooks of the Andes.

### *Province of Sicasica*

In the Province of Sicasica, which lies on the eastern edge of the *altiplano* about halfway between Oruro and La Paz, many Indian communities survive very much in their pre-Conquest form. Here the cantons of Aroma, Umala, and Curaguara

<sup>13</sup> Rigoberto Paredes: Descripción de la Provincia del Cercado [of La Paz], *Bol. Oficina Nac. de Estadíst.*, Vol. 6, 1910, pp. 614-667; Vol. 7, 1911, pp. 1-18. La Paz.

contain the largest number of communities, having 12, 14, and 14, respectively. Illustrative of how lightly the Indian regards any measures taken by the Republic of Bolivia is the fact that, though the town of Umala was separated from Sicasica by the government and was made into a *pueblo* with distinct jurisdiction, the aboriginal population of both towns refuse to recognize the partition, keeping up their original communal arrangement, administering their lands as a unit, and feeding their flocks on common ground as formerly.<sup>14</sup>

In this province there is an example of the odds against which the Indians have to contend in the tenacious effort to cling to their lands. In 1718 and again in 1744 the Indians of the canton of Ayoayo bought back from the Crown of Spain the lands of which they had been despoiled by the *conquistadores*, paying a handsome sum into the King's treasury. In recognition of the transaction they were freed from obligation to pay the *contribución territorial*. In spite of this they have gradually been brought under taxation again, until now only two of the seven communities remain free from the usual payment. In 1729 the Indians of Sicasica, composed of the two customary divisions, *aransaya* and *urinsaya*, with their eleven communities, also bought back their lands in a similar manner and purchased, too, a few adjoining *haciendas*. The latter have now been lost to them, however, by the encroachment of white or *mestizo* neighbors.

### *Province of Pacajes*

There are many strong Indian communities in the Province of Pacajes at the southeastern end of Lake Titicaca. This is a typical *altiplano* province. None of it lies lower than the lake, 12,544 feet above sea level. Most of the territory consists of flat, unproductive plateau, but there are also a number of low hills and ridges that serve to break the unity of the province and that separate the different communities.

A unique group of South American Indians is situated in this

<sup>14</sup> Rigoberto Paredes: Descripción de la Provincia de Sicasica, *Bol. Oficina Nacl. de Estadíst.*, Vol. 6, 1910, pp. 403-426. La Paz.

province. These are the Uros that dwell beside the Desaguadero, the river that drains Lake Titicaca. Subsisting chiefly by hunting and fishing, they ply their reed boats (*balsas*) among the wide-extended swamps that here border the river. Their houses are of rude construction, being built of mud and thatched with straw or *totorá*, the bulrush from which their boats are made. They appear to be among the oldest occupants of the plateau. Apparently stranded in this inhospitable place, they have continued to exist as a distinct tribe, with a language all their own—a survival perhaps of some conquered people, too weak in numbers or in energy to seek a better abode. They enter any discussion of land tenure only in a negative sense, as they are almost entirely landless. They practice little if any agriculture, though some of them now own small herds of cattle and llamas. They form the rare example of a highland Indian tribe which is not markedly attached to the soil, in contrast to the agricultural people that surround them.<sup>15</sup>

On all sides of the Uros are strongly organized and desperately maintained agrarian communities of Aymaras. On the plain and among the hills of this province exist some of the most refractory of the aborigines of Bolivia. They are frequently at war, on a small scale, usually over a question of land. Neighboring *fincas* encroach upon their communal holdings, or some white man or *mestizo* attempts to gain a foothold in their midst, and soon there is a call for troops to quell an Indian uprising. In a few cases they have realized the futility of further struggle and have invited some trusted Bolivian to become their patron, turning over to him their lands to form a *finca* and they themselves becoming his virtual serfs. They are careful, however, to stipulate that ancient customs are to be preserved, and, since among the *finca* Indians of Bolivia as well as in the communities custom is far stronger than law, they are perhaps safer than if they were

<sup>15</sup> José Teribio Polo: Indios Urus del Perú y Bolivia, *Bol. Oficina Nacl. de Estadíst.*, Vol. 6, 1910, pp. 481-517. La Paz.

D. G. Brinton: Observaciones sobre la lengua puquina del Perú, transl. from the English, with an introduction, by Manuel Vicente Ballivián, *Bol. Soc. Geogr. de La Paz*, Vol. 16, 1918, pp. 65-85.

the unprotected prey of the land-hungry, and often entirely unscrupulous, Bolivian *cholo* (half-breed). By such procedure they free themselves, too, from the burdensome oppression exercised by the petty officials of the government. On such *fincas*, and in fact on many others, there persist many of the communal features from days when they were independent.

#### DEPARTMENT OF ORURO

In the Department of Oruro, Indian communities still hold much of the land lying west of the Desaguadero River, particularly in the Province of Carangas. There the *parcialidad* is the prevailing unit. It corresponds to the holdings of a community and has come to be recognized as a political as well as an agrarian unit. Each canton is divided into so many *parcialidades*, usually two or three, and each of these, in turn, contains a group of *ayllus* (from two to ten). In many cases, as on other parts of the plateau, the ancient division of the people into *aransaya* and *urinsaya* (upper and lower town) is still retained.

In the Province of Abaroa many communities exist, particularly in the far western section of the *altiplano*, on the piedmont beyond Lake Coipasa. In this region, far removed from roads and railroads, and in the secluded mountain valleys and basins westward to the Bolivian-Chilean boundary, are timid and primitive Indian groups which preserve their ancient customs, and white people seldom visit them.

In the Province of Cercado, especially in the canton of Paria, there are also found many surviving communities, though here contact with the whites along roads leading from Oruro to La Páz and Cochabamba has favored the absorption of communities by adjoining *fincas*.

In Poopó, about Lake Poopó, communities hold a large share of the land. The inhabitants here divide their time between farming and mining, receiving good wages in the silver mines near by and returning to their fields only for planting and harvesting.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Pedro Aniceto Blanco: *Diccionario geográfico de la República de Bolivia*, Vol. 4: Departamento de Oruro, La Paz, 1904.

## DEPARTMENT OF POTOSÍ

The Department of Potosí, all of which lies high on the *altiplano* or among the elevated ridges of the eastern cordillera, has a big representation of Indian communities. The aboriginal population is there large. According to the last census (1900) there were 189,947 Indians in the department, the larger part of whom are probably still living in communities. Every one of its provinces in 1877 showed an important number of *contribuyentes*, that is, of community Indians who paid their tax on the basis of communal holdings. In this respect Potosí ranked next to La Paz, as it does also in the total Indian population at present. Porco, perched high upon the mountains and overflowing onto the *altiplano*, was largest payer, 10,872 Indians from that province contributing the sum of Bs. 76,862, in the year referred to (1877), as *contribución territorial*. The Province of Frías, a distinctly industrial region surrounding the celebrated silver mines of Potosí, was the province that showed the smallest number of community Indians.

In the Province of Charcas, which projects far toward the north, forming a transition zone between the valley provinces of Cochabamba and the highland areas of Oruro, the communities, though struggling hard to hold their own, are rapidly giving way before the inroads of *mestizos*, who seek the Indian lands. Here practically all the land that is sheltered and well enough watered to make maize cultivation possible has already passed out of aboriginal possession. The Indians retain little except the cold, less productive heights above some 10,000 feet, where only potatoes, ocas, and barley can be raised.<sup>17</sup>

## DEPARTMENT OF CHUQUISACA

The old, well-settled Department of Chuquisaca with its capital, Sucre, the intellectual and cultural hub of the Bolivian world, contains certain provinces where the aboriginal system of

<sup>17</sup> L. S. Sagárnaga: *Diccionario geográfico del Departamento de Potosí* [incomplete], *Anuario Nacl. Estadíst. y Geogr. de Bolivia*, La Paz, 1917, pp. lxxxiii–cclxlii [sic: i.e. cxcxii].

land tenure still holds its own. In the Province of Yamparaez are some of the strongest communities in the republic. Tarabuco and Quilaquila, *cantones* whose farthest borders are not more than thirty miles from Sucre, contain many of these independent settlements. They occupy the high ridges—10,000 to 12,000 feet above sea level—that separate the many valleys of these provinces. The *comunarios* here are of Quechua race, as are almost all of the Indians of the southern half of the highlands. On their cold, bleak heights, all that is now left to them of the extensive lands they held under Inca sway, they cultivate the characteristic upland crops and provide the capital of the republic with much of its food supply. A sharp distinction is made, as in other places, between the *originarios* and the various classes of *agregados*. Here, too, may occasionally be found the ancient designation of *aransaya* and *urinsaya* already noted as preserved on the *altiplano*. Because of its valley character most of the land in Chuquisaca has long since become the property of white owners, excepting the more elevated districts already referred to, the far eastern plains, and the adjoining lower valleys that are inhabited by uncivilized Indians.<sup>18</sup>

#### DEPARTMENT OF COCHABAMBA

Cochabamba long ago ceased to be an Indian country. Traversed as is the department by many fertile valleys, some of them of considerable width, it early became the focus of Spanish settlement. These productive regions, from 6,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level, enjoy an almost ideal climate of constant spring, and so rapidly were they filled with Europeans that the aboriginal race in its purity soon disappeared. As a consequence communal holdings are now rare in any except the higher parts of the department. But in the Provinces of Arque and Tapacarí that lie in the hill country adjoining the Departments of Oruro and Potosí there are localities where Indians retain their land in common as upon the *altiplano*. The industrial activity of recent

<sup>18</sup> Diccionario geográfico del Departamento de Chuquisaca, Sociedad Geográfica Sucre, Sucre, 1903.



years that has accompanied the construction of railroads has brought its menace even to these regions.

### NUMBER OF INDIANS LIVING IN COMMUNITIES

Such are the characteristics and the distribution of the community-held lands in these highland provinces of Bolivia. Statistics showing the amount of land so owned and its exact distribution by political divisions of the country are hard to obtain and at best are fragmentary. Since legally the community no longer exists it finds no recognition in government reports. The most comprehensive figures available bearing upon the extent of communal land are those contained in the "Revisitas indigenales" from 1850 to 1877.<sup>19</sup> These statistics give the number of Indians who, in the specified years, paid the *contribución territorial*. From these data we can obtain not only some light regarding the number of community Indians in each province and department but also a basis for estimating the amount of land they held and cultivated. According to these statistics the number of Indian contributors to the land tax, that is the number of Indians occupying parcels of community land in 1877 (or the last year for which data are given), was, by departments and categories, as summarized in Table I.

TABLE I—INDIAN CONTRIBUTORS TO THE LAND TAX IN 1877

DEPARTMENT	ORIGINARIOS	AGREGADOS	TOTAL OF CONTRIBUTORS
La Paz . . . . .	73,989	13,439	87,428
Potosí . . . . .	14,612	28,493	43,105
Oruro . . . . .	15,636	11,663	27,299
Cochabamba . . . . .	7,295	4,377	11,672
Chquisaca . . . . .	1,647	6,689	8,336
Five highland departments	113,179	64,661	177,840

<sup>19</sup> Cuadros estadísticos de las revisitas indigenales de la República desde el año 1850 á 1877, *Bol. Oficina Nacl. de Inmigr., Estadist. y Propag. Geogr.*, Vol. I, 1901, pp. 513-523. La Paz.

If we allow three persons for each Indian who paid the *contribución territorial*—the basis which is probably most correct for the sedentary tribes of the highlands—we find the Indian population living on community land in these departments to have been about 500,000. The census of 1854 gave the total Indian population of the five departments under consideration as 796,004.<sup>20</sup> Since the different censuses taken show that the Indian population on the plateau does not vary rapidly we may accept that figure as approximately correct for 1877. This would indicate that about 67 per cent of the highland Bolivian Indians were living in communities.

#### EXTENT OF COMMUNITY HOLDINGS

The contents of the *tupu*, or measure of land, assigned to each Indian seems to have varied considerably. In pre-Conquest and early colonial times, we have seen that this measure was equal to 1½ Spanish *fanegas*, or 2.4 acres. But according to the decree of President Achá (dated Oruro, February 28, 1862), upon which Melgarejo's decree of 1866 seems to have been based, a *tupu* is specified to contain 2,000 square *varas*, or 15,456.8 square feet (0.35 acre). In declaring that the *comunarios* should henceforth possess their holdings rent free, Achá specified that each *originario* should receive three *tupus* of good or irrigated, or six *tupus* of poor or unirrigated land: that the *forasteros* (evidently including all the *agregados*) should receive two or four *tupus*, according to the quality.<sup>21</sup> This assignment no doubt was intended to include the usual proportion of fallow land but not the pasture and was intended to represent approximately the extent of tillable land corresponding to each individual in the common holdings. While the former size of the *tupu* (2.4 acres) may have been that employed in Inca times, the latter (0.35 acre) is probably a more accurate measure of the holdings today. It gives us a basis upon which to calculate, approximately at least, the amount of community land in the different provinces

<sup>20</sup> Carlos Bravo: *La patria boliviana: Estado geográfico* (Series: Biblioteca Boliviana de Geografía e Historia), La Paz, 1894, p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Colección oficial de leyes de Bolivia, La Paz (n.d.).



and departments at the date referred to (1877). On this basis, allowing an average of five *tupus* (1.75 acre) for each *originario*, since most of the land left them is poor, and three *tupus* (1.05 acre) for each *agregado*, the figures given in the "Revisitas indigenales" indicate the amounts of agricultural land as being held by communities in the year 1877 (or the last year given) as summarized in Table II.

TABLE II—EXTENT OF INDIAN COMMUNITY HOLDINGS IN 1877  
(in acres)

DEPARTMENT	BY ORIGINARIOS	BY AGREGADOS	TOTAL
La Paz . . . . .	129,470	14,110	143,580
Potosí . . . . .	25,571	29,917	55,488
Oruro . . . . .	27,363	12,246	39,609
Cochabamba . . . . .	12,766	4,595	17,361
Chuquisaca . . . . .	2,882	7,023	9,905
Five highland departments	198,052	67,891	265,943

Probably at least an equal area was occupied for grazing purposes. This would make the entire communal holdings amount to about half a million acres. Señor Luis Crespo, one of the leading Bolivian authorities in geography and statistics, estimates that some 10,000,000 acres in the entire republic are suited to agriculture and that about 5,000,000 acres are actually under cultivation.<sup>22</sup> This would indicate that about one-twentieth of the land under cultivation in the republic is in community holdings. Such is probably an underestimate rather than an exaggeration, since the estimate of 5,000,000 acres for the whole country seems excessively large, and since many Indians are said to escape the land tax by evading registration for the *contribución territorial*.

<sup>22</sup> *Monthly Bull. Internatl. Bur. of the Amer. Republics*, No. 159, Vol. 23, 1906, p. 1467.

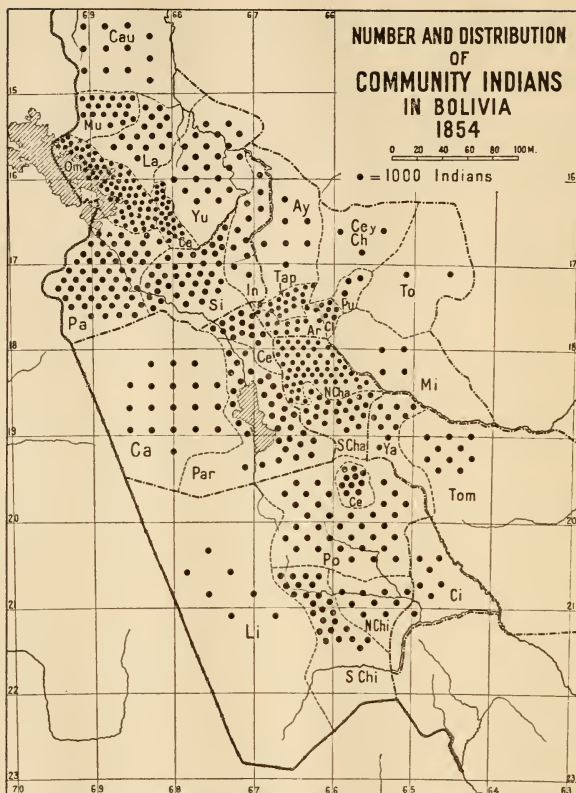


FIG. 4.—Map of highland Bolivia showing the number of community Indians in each province in 1854. Scale 1 : 9,000,000. One dot represents 1,000 Indians in round numbers. For sources used, see footnote 23.

Province boundaries are based on the official map of Bolivia by Ondarza, Mujía, and Camacho, 1 : 1,550,000, published in 1859.

The provinces, grouped by departments, are abbreviated on both maps as follows, the names on the 1900 map which differ from those on the 1854 map being enclosed in brackets: DEPARTMENT OF LA PAZ: Cau, Caupolicán; Mu, Muñecas; La, Larecaja; Yu, Yungas; [N Yu, Nor Yungas; S Yu, Sur Yungas]; Om, Omasuyos; Ce, Cercado (of La Paz); Pa, Pacajes; Si, Sicasica; [Lo, Loaiza]; In, Inquisivi; DEPARTMENT OF URUO: Ca, Carangas; Ce, Cercado (of Oruro); Par, Paria; DEPARTMENT OF COCHABAMBA: Ay, Ayopaya; Tap, Tapacarí; Ar, Arque; Cl, Cliza; [Ta, Tarata]; Pu, Punata; Ce y Ch, Cercado (of Cochabamba) y Chaparé; [Ce, Cercado: Ch, Chaparé]; To, Totora; Mi, Mizque; DEPARTMENT OF

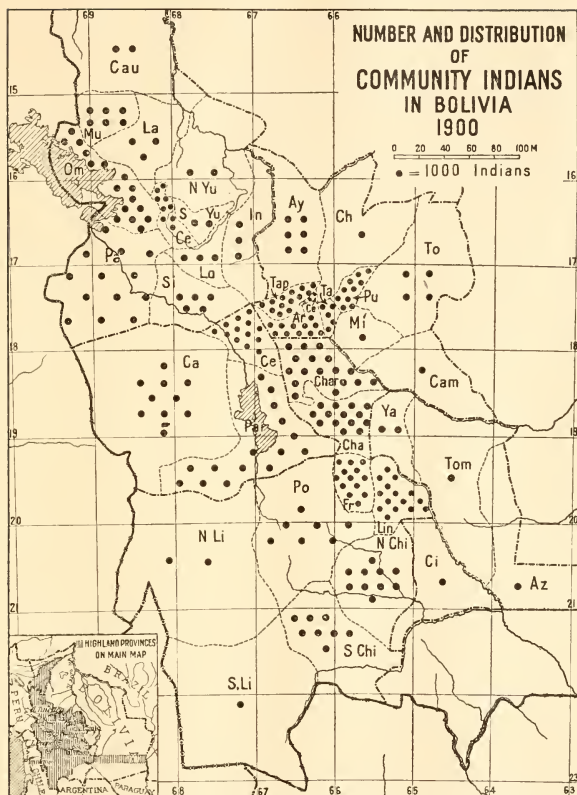


FIG. 5—Map of highland Bolivia showing the approximate number of community Indians in each province in 1900. Scale 1 : 9,000,000. One dot represents 1,000 Indians in round numbers. For sources used, see footnote 23.

Province boundaries are based on the official map of Bolivia by Eduardo Idiáquez, 1 : 2,000,000, published in 1901.

Porosí: N Cha, Nor Chayanta; [Char, Charcas]; S Cha, Sur Chayanta; [Cha, Chayanta]; Po, Porco; [Lin, Linares]; Ce, Cercado (of Potosí); [Fr, Frías]; Li, Lipez; [N Li, Nor Lipez; S Li, Sur Lipez]; S Chi, Sur Chichas; N Chi, Nor Chichas; DEPARTMENT OF CHUQUISACA: Ci, Cinti; Tom, Tomina; [Az, Azero]; Ya, Yamparaez.

The figures for 1854 were taken from the "revisitas indigenales" referred to in footnote 19, the number represented on the map being the total of *comunarios* (*originarios*, *reservados*, *forasteros*, and *próximos*) as given in that enumeration for the year 1854 or the nearest year thereto, multiplied by three.

## PRESENT TENDENCIES

These figures must be taken to represent only approximately the population of the communities today and the amount of land now occupied by them, as their number has decreased considerably since 1877. The extinction of the communities is becoming more rapid each year, particularly since the construction of railroads has stimulated the development of industries, commerce, and agriculture, increasing the demand for farming land. There is, too, a constantly growing population of landless *mestizos*, who, failing to inherit rural property but eager to own *fincas*, are setting themselves, often absolutely without scruple or compassion, to secure the parcels of land now held by Indians. The economic income from land is still not great, but under the peon system prevailing in Bolivia possession of a farm gives the owner the personal services of his Indian tenants and thus adds materially to his comfort and social standing.

An attempt is made in Figures 4 and 5 to show the number and distribution of community Indians in 1854 and in 1900.<sup>23</sup> It will be observed that there has been a decrease in every province of three departments (La Paz, Oruro, and Chuquisaca) and in all but four provinces of the other departments (Cochabamba and Potosí). The decrease has generally been very marked, in most cases reaching more than 50 per cent, and, in a few instances, being over 75 per cent, e. g., in the valley provinces of Nor Yungas, Inquisivi, and Caupolicán of the De-

<sup>23</sup> Since no figures of the same character exist for 1900, because the legal status of the communities is no longer recognized, we have been compelled to calculate the number of *comunarios* from the land tax (*contribución territorial*), paid by the community Indians, in distinction to the *contribución predial*, paid by the *hacienda* holders. The census gives the amount of *contribución territorial* paid in 1900, by departments, and also gives the total Indian population by provinces (Censo general de la población de la República de Bolivia, Tomo II: Resultados definitivos, La Paz, 1904, pp. xlvi, ff.).

In calculating the number of *comunarios* from these figures it has been assumed that the proportion of *originarios* to the other classes has remained the same as in the "revisitas." Hence the tax of 1900 may be divided among these classes in the same proportion, thus giving us the number of *originarios* and other classes in each department. We then find the percentage of community Indians in the total Indian population of each department and, applying the same percentage to the figures for the total Indian population of each province, we find the approximate number of *comunarios* in each province.

partment of La Paz, in the far-eastern foothills province of Tomina of the Department of Chuquisaca, and in the Cerecado (and Chaparé) of Cochabamba.

The Indian well understands how his white neighbors covet his lands. He is always suspicious of any visitor in the neighborhood of the community. Occasionally he enters an emphatic protest against the persistent pressure of whites upon the border of his inherited domain, and the Bolivian people live in ill-concealed fear of a general uprising. Only a few years ago alarming rumors were circulated throughout the highlands of a carefully prepared insurrection by which the Indians hoped to regain their lost lands. There was ground for the rumor, for the owners of many farms were either threatened or actually attacked by their own tenants, and a considerable army of Indians gathered on the hills overlooking the city of La Paz. Troops were required to quell the uprising, and some hundred or so of the most audacious spirits were rounded up for a few months of prison life, which proved sufficient to smother the threatened outbreak.

But the unrest still exists both among the communities and on the large farms where the Indian lives attached to the estate as a kind of serf. For there is no matter that so vitally concerns the aborigine of these highlands as the little parcel of soil which has come down to him, either as an individual or as a member of the clan, from uncounted generations of his fathers.













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